

rare and sweet as cherry wine by cathect

Category: IT (2017), Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Bullying?, Hurt/Comfort-ish, M/M, brief descriptions of minor injuries, i love this ship so goddamn much, richie is a rowdy boy who fights for his mans's honor

Language: English

Relationships: Will Byers/Richie Tozier

Status: Completed

Published: 2018-03-20

Updated: 2018-03-20

Packaged: 2022-04-21 15:26:43

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,179

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

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“Richie, you can’t just fight everyone who upsets me.” Will says with a roll of his eyes.

Richie scoffs. “I can sure as fuck try.”

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Author's Note:

a few notes about this fic:

- this is set during the boys' junior year of high school! i didn't mention it specifically, but that's about the age i imagined them at.
- details of the crossover don't matter, so just use whatever details you want as background!
- this fic contains brief descriptions of minor injuries. i can't imagine it would be much of an issue for anyone, but i wanted to say it just to be safe!
- is this a modern au? who fucking knows??? not me, that's for sure!
- troy doesn't have a canon last name, so erin and i just made one up.

big thank you as always to erin for editing! i would truly be nothing without her.

“Your hands are shaking.”

Will glances down at his palms self-consciously before he digs through the first aid kit in his lap. He's sitting next to Richie on the couch, trying to figure out what he needs to patch his best friend up. Richie's got a busted lip and a black eye, along with a cut along his upper cheek. His shirt is covered in dirt, and they aren't sure what the damage is beneath the worn fabric yet, but he swears up and down that none of his ribs feel broken. His glasses are somehow only marginally damaged, one arm bent at an odd angle but no cracks in the lenses, off to the side on the coffee table.

“Does it— does it hurt?” Will asks as he reaches out towards Richie's face. His fingers graze near the black eye, but he's careful not to apply any real pressure.

“Yeah,” Richie admits breezily. “But it's okay. It was worth it.” He meets Will's eyes and Will looks away, blushing. He looks down at

the first aid kit instead of Richie's purpling face, and his eyes shake but he can't bring himself to close them.

The image of Richie taking punch after punch is what he sees every time he blinks, like it's ingrained into his eyelids. It's all he really remembers from the situation: for some reason, the time between someone calling Will "*Zombie Boy*" and Richie throwing the first punch is almost nonexistent in Will's memory. Words could have been thrown back and forth for two minutes, or it could have been an hour, but Will can only seem to remember when fists started flying.

Richie may have started the fistfight, but it was Troy who ended it. Troy had James to help him out, while Richie was on his own, and four fists are always better than two, even if Richie had a couple inches on them both. He'd held his own pretty well, for the most part, up until James had faked him out and landed a right hook to his gut, sending Richie to the ground.

Will couldn't help; he couldn't even move once he heard that stupid fucking nickname.

The first time he'd heard it since middle school, and he still froze like a deer in headlights. Most people had gotten over the whole thing since then— Will included, or at least so he thought. A lot of Hawkins doesn't seem to even remember it happened— except Troy fucking Weston, apparently.

"You didn't have to do that," Will mutters for at least the fifth time since it happened. He rifles through the kit some more and makes a small noise of victory when he finds a box of antiseptic wipes. He rips one open and pulls it out of its packaging.

"Of course I did," Richie says, wincing as Will raises the wipe to the cut on his cheek. Will mutters a soft apology as he carefully drags the wipe across the worst of Richie's cut. Richie's mouth ticks up into an understanding smile as Will cleans his skin as gently as he can. "It made you upset. I wasn't just going to ignore it." Richie adds quietly.

"Richie, you can't just fight everyone who upsets me." Will says with a roll of his eyes.

Richie scoffs. "I can sure as fuck try."

Will doesn't respond because he doesn't know what to say, and they spend the next couple of minutes in silence as he works on Richie's injuries. In hindsight, they're not too bad: nothing needing a more skilled touch than Will, nothing a dollar-store first aid kit can't fix. Even so, Will's heart still lurches every time Richies flinches.

By the time they're done, the sun is setting.

"I need a fucking cigarette," Richie mutters, reaching for the pack that's sitting on the coffee table. It's Joyce's, and Richie knows that. His borrowing from her stash is as common as Joyce's playful chiding anytime she catches Richie with one of her menthols hanging from his mouth. He stands and stretches and heads for the front door. For some reason, Will's chest aches to see him walk away.

"Wait for me," he calls. He shoves the supplies back into the first aid kit and practically jumps up from the couch. He steps over their backpacks and follows Richie out when he opens the door.

Richie left his glasses inside, so his movements are a little awkward as he drops down to sit cross-legged on the walkway. Will sits next to him and watches Richie lean on his side, digging in his pockets for his lighter. Richie hums in victory when he finds it— in the left one, where it always is. Will doesn't tease him for it like he normally would. Today isn't normal.

Richie's lighter is old and probably needs to be replaced. Will bought it for him a few years ago; a silver Zippo that he painted Richie's name on the side of. He can just barely see the faded paint under Richie's fingers. Big cursive letters now surrounded by the scratches and dents of regular use.

The sunset is beautiful. All pink and orange and swirling purple. Will suddenly wishes he'd thought to grab his sketchbook on the way out. He doesn't smoke anyway, just sits with Richie while he does because the smell and familiarity of the act is almost comforting. Will pulls his knees up to his chest as Richie taps out a cigarette from the pack.

The lighter takes a few tries to catch, a testament to its age. It does

need to be replaced; Will wonders if it'd be weird to get him a new one as a sort of thanks for today. The sound of the flame trying to ignore Richie's thumb dragging against the wheel fills the silence between them, and it's just as it finally ignites that Will's chest explodes with the need to say something.

"What you did today, for me." Will chews his lip and lets it go. He lays his head on his crossed arms to look over at Richie. "Why?"

Richie chuckles. He takes the first shaky drag off his cigarette and exhales into the crisp, February air. "You know why, Will."

Will falls silent again. *Does he know why?*

But then he thinks about it. Thinks about all the glances in the hallways, the brush of hands as they study too close together with their friends. Richie's fingers tangled with Will's under a blanket during movie nights. Waking up to Richie climbing in through his window at night, then falling asleep to his soft snoring coming from the bean bag chair in the corner of Will's room— neither of them ever brave enough to suggest Richie sharing his bed.

Most importantly, he thinks about days like today. Richie fighting so fiercely to protect Will from shit he's been dealing with his whole life. Richie having a black fucking eye because he stepped between Will and a stupid *nickname*. Richie taking nearly ten blows to his stomach and ribs before Troy decided he wasn't having fun anymore. Richie doing all of it for *Will*.

Well, shit. Will guesses he does know why.

"Richie—" Will starts, but he doesn't know where to end. He doesn't know how to explain all the feelings that are jumbled up inside his head like radio static.

Richie shakes his head, bringing the cigarette to his lips and taking another drag. Will watches as he angles it to the side of his mouth, avoiding the cut in his bottom lip.

"Don't, Will." His voice comes out strained, and he exhales the smoke when he's done. "Please, don't." Will opens his mouth to respond, but

Richie shakes his head again.

That's when it dawns on Will: Richie's *afraid*.

This is probably as close to baring his soul as Richie will ever get. He's given Will a glimpse of how he feels, which isn't something he does often, and Will's going to take the opportunity while it's available to him. Even if he's just as terrified.

"Richie, look at me," he says, stretching his legs back out and turning to face his friend. Richie takes great care to face the other way as he drops his cigarette to the ground and crushes it under his heel. It's not even half finished, but Richie either doesn't notice or doesn't care. He starts to shift where he sits, like he's uneasy, the way he moves when he's getting ready to bolt.

"I know what you're going to say," he mutters, "and I can't hear it, Will. I just can't."

Before he can stop himself, Will reaches out and turns Richie's chin to face him. Richie's gaze is still downcast but he doesn't pull away.

"Stop acting like I'm so fucking predictable," Will whispers, the last few words muffled against Richie's mouth as he kisses him—

— and then immediately pulls away at Richie's pained groan.

Will's eyes go wide in panic as Richie's tongue darts out to gently touch his split lip. He winces at his own action, and Will deflates a little. The moment evaporates as Will lets his hand fall from Richie's chin, and Will swallows around the lump of nerves in his throat.

Richie just shrugs and leans in again with a smile.

Richie tastes like cigarettes and Heaven and a bit like the fruity Nicorette gum he chews even though he's not trying to quit. He slips a hand into Will's hair and holds him in place gently. Will melts into the touch and opens his mouth wider, even as the copper tang of blood grows stronger. He thinks it should be weird, maybe, but it's not really, especially compared to everything else in Will's life. As the kiss deepens, he sighs into Richie's mouth.

They only break away when the sun has set completely and Will's teeth are chattering too much for them to be kissing properly anymore. Despite the cold, they don't get up immediately. Will laces his fingers with Richie's and brings the other boy's bruised knuckles to his lips. Richie tilts his head, pressing his own kiss into Will's forehead.

The headlights of Joyce's Buick shine into their eyes as she pulls into the driveway. In a matter of seconds, she's jumping out of her seat and rushing up the walkway to them.

"What the hell are you two doing out here without jackets on?" She throws her hands up for emphasis as she speaks, car keys jingling around her finger. When she sees Richie's face, she gasps. "Richie, Jesus, what happened?"

Richie laughs softly into Will's ear, squeezing his fingers as he stands up and pulls Will with him. "It's sort of a long story," he says, even though it's not. Joyce rolls her eyes.

"Well then I suppose you'll have to tell me over dinner." Her voice is laced with irritation, but the invitation is as gentle and sincere as always.

"I'm staying for dinner?" Richie asks, unable to contain the snark even if he wanted to. Will rolls his eyes too, most likely a mirror image of his mother, as he answers Richie's squeeze with one of his own.

"Yes," he says, adding under his breath, "idiot." But his chest hurts when Richie lets go of his hand and backs away to give Joyce room.

Joyce snorts and passes between them to go inside, leaving the door open and clearly expecting them to follow. As soon as her back is to them, Richie pulls Will in for another kiss. It's quick and soft, but it sends Will's heart careening against his ribs.

"Oh, will you two just get inside?" Joyce yells. She's leaning against the threshold, arms crossed over her chest and grinning at them fondly. She stares for a moment longer, then rolls her eyes and disappears back inside.

Richie drops his head back in a bark of laughter but he reaches out for Will's hand again. He smirks at Will and pulls him through the open door, letting it fall shut behind them. Richie checks that Joyce is busy in the kitchen before facing Will with a grin. He tugs him closer for one last kiss, one that's eager and sweet— until it's a little *too* eager, apparently, because Richie hisses in pain. He rears back and brings a hand up to prod at his damaged lip.

Richie pulls his fingers back and shows the faint blood on them to Will, who rolls his eyes, even as a smile tugs at his lips. He pulls Richie towards the couch and opens the first aid kit yet again. They fall silent for a bit, only the sounds of Joyce starting on dinner filling the empty air, as Will dabs at Richie's lip with a cotton ball. Once it's clean, Richie pretends to preen like a peacock, and even shoots Will a wink as if to say *look, good as new*.

“Idiot,” Will says again, impossibly fond and unable to resist kissing Richie again, split lip be damned.

Author's Note:

drop me a comment and let me know what you think! validation is my life source and without it i would truly perish!

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